



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENT IN SHELLEY.

BY GEORGE SPENCER BOWER.

The century in which we live has, according to Mr. Freeman, originated a fresh instrument of research, a new point of departure for the acquisition of knowledge, a sort of third Renaissance of the human intellect. This instrument he believes to exist in the Comparative Method as applied to different branches of inquiry. We see now, to a greater extent than formerly, that the principles of law, religion, politics, art, or philosophy, characteristic of a given people in a given age, are not final, but must be collated with those existing in other countries at the same epoch, or those existing at other epochs in the same country, if we would determine the grand elements of truth which underlie the various modes of its manifestation, and disengage the central mass of what is rational and eternal from the outlying margin of the merely temporary and conventional.

Another tendency of mind, necessarily related to the above and proceeding on parallel lines with it, is the tendency to regard the genius of a great man in connection with precedent conditions and the past history of human endeavor, as well as in its isolation and heaven-derived strength; to see how such men are, in a manner, necessitated by the previous progress of humanity toward the attainment and realization of truth; and in what sense they mark a step forward on the well-beaten road. And not only so, but the minds of such men are considered also in their relation to contemporary influences, and are thus recognized as being intricate and complex totalities, with many other elements entering into their composition than the particular ones assigned to them in each case by popular opinion and speech, which, as it necessarily cannot spend time over a multitude of names, labels them once for all poetic, philosophic, critical, or statesmanlike, and has done with it. We see a great spirit as it is constituted by the delicate balance and interdependence of several different faculties, each with its bearing on the others, and each, moreover, having its point of contact with corresponding

spheres of contemporary intellectual activity. A really transcendent genius, of whatever cast, cannot—except for purposes of convenience and brevity of expression—be enclosed within a stereotyped category, or characterized in terms of a stereotyped definition. Words must expand themselves beyond such limits if they are to become adequate to the elasticity of the mind whose inmost workings they wish to expound—if they are to satisfy the demands of philosophical accuracy and completeness. Can we understand Plato or Bacon by calling them philosophers? Shakespeare, Dante, or Goethe by calling them poets? Were not the former—though from different standpoints—as much poets as philosophers, and the latter—also from different standpoints—as much philosophers as poets?¹ Such spirits as these are complicated organisms, and must be judged as such. To dissect their wholeness, to disturb the existing harmony of parts and correlation of faculties—still more, to sever one faculty from its organic connection with the rest, and to describe it as being the life itself—this is to deprive these spirits, in our attempted explanation of them, of all that which makes them what they are.

In the productions of a really great mind there exist *implicit* many other elements than those which have procured for that mind its special designation in popular speech—elements which it is the task of criticism to render *explicit*. The true Master-spirit, the Finished Scholar, as Fichte would call him (meaning by the term a good deal more than is ordinarily meant), is one who exhibits—must, by the nature of him, exhibit—not only knowledge, but also Love of Wisdom; and not only Love of Wisdom, but also Power of Making; who is always, in fact, Man of Science, Philosopher, and Poet in one—and this by whatever distinctive appellation he may be known to the world. And thus it is that in any poetry which deserves the name—and such all would consider Shelley's to be—it is not unreasonable, and may perhaps be instructive, to seek out evidences of the more strictly speculative and philosophical side of its author's genius.

¹ Mr. Masson, in his "Essay on Shakespeare and Goethe" ("English Poets," pp. 1-37), brings out the deeply philosophical element in the mind of the former. He says on p. 18, after objecting to such phrases as "William the Calm," "William the Cheerful," etc., when regarded as expressing the whole or even any considerable part of Shakespeare's mind, "If we were to select that designation which would, as we think, express Shakespeare in his most intimate and private relations to man and nature, we should rather say William the Meditative, William the Metaphysical, or William the Melancholy." See the whole essay.

It is, indeed, sometimes objected that it is wrong and ridiculous to expect philosophical doctrine, moralizing rhetoric, or didactic purposes from poetry or productions of art. It is urged that the poet or the artist ought simply to interpret and combine and add coloring to whatsoever inward emotions and sympathies and enthusiasms of mind come within the range of his experience, or that of his country and age ; or to translate the phenomena of outward Nature as affecting mind : and, in either case, to idealize and unify the otherwise chaotic fragments around him with sole reference to the beautiful, the simple, or the harmonious as standards ; and that, therefore, it is not his province to strike attitudes as a pedagogue, or a dogmatizer, a preacher, or for the good of society. As Shelley himself says, in "Peter Bell the Third"—

"their station,
Is to delight, not pose."

Such is the principle on which Mr. Austin vigorously insists in an essay which appeared a few months ago in the "Contemporary Review." The principle itself is perfectly sound, and is approved by such excellent critics as Goethe¹ and De Quincey ; but when Mr. Austin goes on to found on that principle his objection to all attempts—such as that of Mr. Stopford Brooke, whom he selects for special condemnation—to find in poetic works and unearth therefrom latent elements of theology, philosophy, or morals, he appears to me to be confusing two separate things. Poetry must not *consciously strive* to make itself useful, to give pleasure, to produce moral effects, or to inculcate definite views on questions of metaphysics—all this is outside the proper *aim and intention* of the poet. So much is quite true ; but surely it is not to be denied that all the above are (unintended, no doubt, but none the less actual) *results* of the poetical, as of most other forms of composition ; though none would wish the author of such poetry to distort himself, and transcend his legitimate sphere, in the conscious endeavor to realize these results. So that neither is Mr. Stopford Brooke to be blamed for finding theology in Wordsworth, nor Conington for extracting the idea of the "Glorification of Labor" from Virgil's "Georgics," nor Plato for seeing moral lessons in Homer, and denouncing them, moreover, as bad moral lessons, nor, lastly—to come down to our

¹ The reader will remember a fine passage in "Wilhelm Meister," where he protests against the "lightly moving, all-conceiving spirit of the poet" being chained to a kennel, like a house-dog, or made to plough, like an ox.

present subject—is it unreasonable or extravagant to attempt to evolve from Shelley's works those philosophical principles, which it would have been ridiculous *in him* to have consciously endeavored to inculcate by their means ; just as it would have been ridiculous in Wordsworth, Virgil, or Homer to have proposed to themselves, as their several objects, the writing of treatises on divinity, farming, and ethics respectively.¹

But, apart from this necessity in criticism of studying a great mind in all its aspects, and in all its relations to the various objects of thought, I would further claim consideration for my subject by drawing attention more particularly to the specially close relationship and mutual implication of Poetry and Philosophy, and to the many intellectual features which they possess in common. The "old quarrel" between the two no longer exists. Men see now, as they did not see in Plato's time, that the one is to a great extent involved in the other ; that while Poetry reposes very frequently on—if not developed, at all events, inchoate—principles of philosophy, Philosophy, on the other side, when of a constructive and not a merely negative and skeptical character, breathes aspirations which fairly entitle her, in some of her moods, to enter the legitimate domain of *ποίησις* or Creation. It is the object of both to pierce beneath and behind the outward veil—the "schein"—of the phenomenal world to the inwardness and reality of things ; or, if the less sombre of the twin sisters loves to linger awhile and hold converse with Nature in the outer courts of the temple, and on the lowest flights of steps, it is only because she knows that these are in truth *nothing but* encircling courts and ascending steps, and that she must mount upward and onward through the shrine, which is redolent of a far deeper and more spiritual incense than they, to the altar itself of Ideal Beauty. She uses Nature's forms merely as the firm setting—the solid background—to the airy phantasms of her own conjuring. Philosophy endeavors to draw by main force, Poetry to lure by her enticements, the Earth-spirit from behind her lovely but (in itself) illegible vesture of Space, and the Spirit of the Time from behind the dial-face of recorded history ; but both are products of a common root. Each is ever whispering to herself, half in tremulous awe, and half in tumultuous rapture, that now at length—

ὁ χερσὶν οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων ἔσται δεδορκώς,

¹ Shelley himself frequently expresses his horror of consciously didactic poetry. See especially his preface to the "Prom. Unbound," vol. I., p. 267, ed. Mrs. Shelley ; also, "Defence of Poetry," p. 18.

and that the secret of the universe will be laid open to view. Each (as regards the history both of the race and the individual) is born of wonder, of reverence toward the boundless expanse of the world around us, and the bottomless profundity of the world within us. They act alternately as vehicles for expressing one another. The poet is often, perhaps without being specially conscious of it, working out the severest problems of morals and metaphysics; the metaphysician, in his desperate endeavors to break down the barrier which divides him from the sanctuary of Truth, often uses language which kindles—cannot but kindle—into the ruddy flame of imaginative inspiration, and employs himself on ideas which finally land him in a region far beyond that where the mere discursive exercise of the understanding would be of any avail.¹

Hence only is it that we can explain the significance and true value of the well-known “intellectual midwifery” practised by Socrates. He saw men burning with thought which could not find vent in the channels of ordinary language. Now, if the subject of such philosophic emotion happened to be a man of lively genius, a Plato, for instance, he solved the difficulty by finding an *extraordinary* language, burst forth into ecstatic song, and became, in fact, a mystic—I use the word in no bad sense—and a poet. The ordinary souls, however, *felt* what they could not put into words—they were vexed with “the pain of a great idea;” and it was for this malady of thought that Socrates offered his services. The gifted spirits did not need them; but it was this blind yearning in the commoner intellects of essentially poetic impulses, without the means of poetic expression, which the great psychological doctor pitied and sought to alleviate. In both these orders of mind, however, honestly and earnestly grappling with philosophical problems, arises that creative longing (incipient, indeed, in the one class, and only fully developed and self-conscious in the other, but equally existing in both), which is usually considered proper to poetry alone as distinct from philosophy. In reality, however, both Poetry and Philosophy are aspirations toward the Infinite through the Finite, toward the Metaphysical (Behind- or Beyond-the-Physical) through the Physical, toward the Supernatural through the Natural. Plato’s description of the philosophic life—*δυσίωσις τῷ θεῷ*—will also apply to that of the true poet. He, as much as the philosopher, seeks the general in the particular, the spiritual in the material, the ideal in the reality,

¹ On this see a fine passage in Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry,” pp. 11, 12; also p. 55.

the permanent in the variable and evanescent. Both abjure the accidents and specialities of life, or, so far as they come in contact with them, employ them not so much for their own sakes as in the way of incarnations, symbols, or illustrative examples of what is neither special nor accidental.

These considerations may suffice by way of reply to a not impossible question of the reader's on seeing the heading of this essay: "What have Poetry and Philosophy to do with one another?" Dismissing, however, for the present the general question of the close kinship and constant interaction existing between these two great forms of intellectual movement, we have, as to the present subject of inquiry, independent evidence that Shelley's mental habits and tastes led him originally in the direction of metaphysical study quite as much as in that of poetry. As to the question of fact, it will be sufficient to quote the following distinct statement of Mrs. Shelley, who says (in the preface to vol. I. of the "Essays, Letters from Abroad, Prose Fragments, etc."), alluding to the detached thoughts on metaphysical questions contained in that collection:—

"The fragments of metaphysics will be highly prized by a metaphysician. Such a one is aware how difficult it is to strip bare the internal nature of man, to divest it of prejudice, of the mistakes engendered by familiarity, and by language, which has become one with certain ideas, and those very ideas erroneous." (The above remark, by the way, illustrates our position that the poet and the philosopher are, at least, supplementary the one to the other. The latter gives us the eternal properties of thought disengaged from adventitious accretions; the former holds up to our view the embodied energies of pure passion disenthralled from qualification by triviality and custom.) "Had not Shelley deserted metaphysics for poetry in his youth, and had he not been lost to us early, so that all his vaster projects were wrecked with him in the waves, he would have presented the world with a complete theory of mind; a theory to which Berkeley, Coleridge, and Kant¹ would have contributed;

¹ Is there any evidence of Shelley's having studied Kant in the original, or of his having become seriously acquainted with his doctrines through Coleridge? The above words almost seem to imply, but do not necessarily imply, that he had done one or the other. He first refers to Kant in "Peter Bell the Third:" "The Devil then sent to Leipsic fair, For Born's translation of Kant's book; A world of words, tail foremost, Where" . . . etc. There are no traces, however, of a Kantian influence in his poetical writings. Indeed, it is antecedently improbable, as I shall endeavor to point out that a mind constituted as Shelley's was, could have had any sympathy with the dualistic attitude of Kant.

but more simple, inexpugnable, and entire than the systems of these writers. . . . These intense meditations on his own nature thrilled him with pain. Thought kindled imagination . . . etc."

In these last words we see how his philosophy merged in his poetry, yet without being lost or swallowed up in it; in fact, it was this oneness of his ratiocinative thought and his creative fancy, which combined to produce that peculiar intellectual quality which stands out so conspicuously in his life, and his life's work—

" in alto intelletto un puro core,
Frotto senile in sol giovenil flore;
E in aspetto pensoso, anima lieta."

The fact of his philosophical tastes being thus beyond all question, let us now consider the particular direction which these tastes took.

Every philosopher, it has been said, is either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. We may perhaps express the distinction more appropriately in modern phraseology, if we say that every man is either a believer in some one of the different forms assumed by dualism, the system, that is, which divides existence (using that form in its widest possible signification) into two separate worlds of nature and of spirit, of outward and of inward, of objects and of ideas, and sets these two worlds over against one another as alien and irreconcilable, and not mutually commutable or expressible, the one in terms of the other; or else he holds to the reduction of all kinds of existence, both in the sensible and the intelligible universe, to some one element, whether that element be thought, which chokes itself with matter, or matter which gives the "promise and potency" of thought; that is, he gives in his adherence to monism in one or other of its shapes. It was ably pointed out in an article on Kant's philosophy, which appeared in the June number of "*Macmillan's Magazine*," that it is generally the practical and analytical mind which devotes itself to the former type, while the creative, imaginative, synthetic orders of intellect usually take up enthusiastically with the latter. It is obvious which system Shelley, the most delicately imaginative of all imaginative poets, *must* have made his own, if he was not to abdicate every prerogative, and mutilate every characteristic feature of his genius. He never could have believed in any form of dualism. It is almost equally obvious that, of the two kinds of monism alluded to above, he must ultimately have adopted that which conceives mind as always prior to nature, as constructing its own world, and as finding itself, and itself only, in material phe-

nomena. I say "ultimately," because Shelley did, as will be seen, find a temporary resting-place in materialism, but, as might be supposed, did not derive satisfaction from it for more than a very brief period. But the two forms of monism were the two opinions between which he for a moment halted: he never doubted as to the relative merits of monism itself and dualism. He gives dramatic expression in a magnificent passage in the "Hellas" to the conflict between dualism and common sense, on the one hand, in the person of Mahmud, and monism and inspiration, on the other, as represented by Ahasuerus, in a manner which leaves little doubt as to the side on which he himself stood. The passage is, perhaps, in all his works, the most purely philosophical in language, and at the same time directly expressive of the particular views on such questions which he always held in the maturity of his powers. On both grounds it is well worthy of being quoted in full:—

Mahmud. Thou art an adept in the different lore
Of Greek and Frank philosophy. . . .

Thy spirit is present in the past, and sees
The birth of this old world in all its cycles
Of desolation and of loveliness;
And when man was not, and how man became
The monarch and the slave of this low sphere,
And all its narrow circles—it is much,
I honor thee, and would be what thou art
Were I not what I am;

Ahasuerus. Sultan! talk no more
Of thee and me, the future and the past;
But look on that which cannot change—the One,
The unborn, and the undying. Earth and ocean,
Space, and the isles of life or light that gem
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
The firmament pavilioned on Chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire,
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds—this Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent and tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision; all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles, and dreams;
Thought is its cradle, and its grave, nor less

The future and the past are idle shadows
Of thought's eternal flight¹—they have no being ;
Naught is but that it feels itself to be.

Mahmud. What meanest thou? thy words stream like a tempest
Of dazzling mist within my brain—they shake
The earth on which I stand, and hang like night
On heaven above me. What can they avail?
They cast on all things, surest, brightest, best,
Doubt, insecurity, astonishment.

Ahasuerus. Mistake me not! All is contained in each.
Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
Is that which has been, or will be, to that
Which is—the absent to the present. Thought
Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die ;
They are what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er—worlds, worms,
Empires, and superstitions. What has thought
To do with time, or place, or circumstance?

In this splendid rhapsody, this hymnic glorification of the might and majesty of creative thought, we have Shelley's quasi-formal exposition of the poetic side of the philosophy which claimed his allegiance, namely, idealism ; we have the reasoned tenets of Berkeley, clothed, not in syllogisms, but in language "transmuted by the secret alchemy" of inspiration to such "potable gold" as flows fresh from the inmost depths of Plato's eagle spirit—such words as burn with ruder glare and less restrained vigor in Neo-Platonic mysticism—such figures as gleam for us once more out of darkness in that desperate struggle of abstract thought to find an opening for itself from out of the cavern of common speech in which it is enchained, and to turn the "idola" of its prison into its vehicles and instruments, which characterizes the efforts of a Fichte, a Hegel, or a Coleridge. The *indirect* influence of Shelley's metaphysics on the general tone of his productions will be considered below ; meanwhile, for their direct manifestation and exposition, could we desire anything finer ?

¹ Shelley constantly insists on the eternity of Thought in his poetry: *cp.* in the same drama :—

"Based on the crystalline sea
Of thought and its eternity."

(Vol. II., p. 153, of Mrs. Shelley's edition.)

Could Plato himself have chanted a nobler pœan to the eternal idea of the good, or to the imperishable and all-pervading energy of reason and her children?

There can be no doubt, then, of Shelley's rejection of dualism, of which step, indeed—besides that we might almost conclude on *a priori* grounds that it would have been an absolutely necessary one for a man of his intellectual calibre—we have evidence enough not only in the above passage, but also in other plain declarations scattered throughout his prose works. He speaks, for instance, in the short fragment "On Life" ("Essays, Letters from Abroad, etc.," ed. Mrs. Shelley, vol. I., page 225), of "the shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals, and their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things," where it is plain from the context that he is alluding to the common-sense or dualistic theory of the universe. Nor does an examination of the subtler tones and influences in his poetry lead us to suppose that he ever entertained for a moment a belief in the separate action of matter and mind as independent co-factors in the building up of the intelligible world.

But though Shelley's consistent rejection of Dualism is beyond question, as also is his equally consistent adoption of Monism, *in some form or other*, through all periods of his literary career; when we come to ask which of the two main forms of the latter it was that he accepted, here the case is different, and we find that his attitude is not always the same.

Shelley began by believing in Materialism. This, however, was only a temporary stage; and, even while he did hold the tenets of that system, he held them in such a way, and with such qualifications, as to show that his real bent was towards Immaterialism, or Intellectualism, his passage to which was not long in being brought about. Materialism, I have said, could not hold a man of Shelley's vivid imagination in bondage for long. We may distinguish two main types of it, a lower and a higher, each of which Shelley abandoned in turn, beginning at the lower, or French type, which produced no influence on his poetry. The other kind—the Baconian—left its mark on "Queen Mab," and other very early pieces. With regard to the former—the crude realism of Condorcet, D'Alembert, Diderot, and other analysts of the French Revolution—Mrs. Shelley says, in her "Editor's Notes to 'Queen Mab:,'" "His readings were not always well chosen" (*sc.*, about 1810); "among them were the works of the French philosophers. As far as metaphysical argument

went, he *temporarily* became a convert." This lasted but for a very short time. It is evident that such almost brutal realism, if once seriously believed in, would, whatever else it might do, kill poetry outright. It was this chemical analysis "*usque ad atomum*," this dissection of nature's unity, this spirit which revels in the slavish task of grinding the most ethereal beauty into elemental dust grains indistinguishable from one another, and

"Viewing all objects unremittingly
In disannexion, dead and spiritless,
And still dividing, and dividing still,
Breaks down all grandeur"—

which has excited the heartfelt abhorrence, in different times and countries, alike of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, of Keats, of Schiller, of Carlyle, of Plato,¹ and of all true poets. Any one who could imagine Shelley in his poetic character seriously accepting the principles and procedure of a Condorcet or Helvetius, could picture to himself Hobbes or Gassendi writing lyric odes.

Enough, then, of this philosophy. Its bestial unsightliness could never have been allied with "The Witch Poesy;" and though, in the notes to "Queen Mab," Shelley makes profuse quotations from Bailly's "Lettres sur les Sciences à Voltaire," Cabanis's "Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme," and Baron d'Holbach's "Système de la Nature" (of which last, indeed, he had at one time projected a translation), and works of a similar character; yet the poem itself, immature as it was, presented beauties which far transcended the sphere of the exercise of the French scalpel, and indeed must have done so, if it was to be a poem at all. A man, we say, is often better than his theories; and it is clear in this case that the poet was better than his annotations; though even in one of his notes he writes: "This negation" (*sc.* of the Deity) "must be understood solely to affect a creative deity. The hypothesis of a per-vading spirit, co-eternal with the universe, remains unshaken."

The last sentence seems to give us a notion of the kind of transition stage in his opinions by which Shelley escaped from French materialism to a somewhat higher and more etherealized doctrine, a sort of semi-material pantheism. "Queen Mab" was written in 1810. But, during 1814 and 1815, on turning to the list of books which

¹ In Plato's case, it was the poet in him more than the philosopher which cried out against "the brood of hard and repellent men, who will understand nothing but what they can grip in their hands" (*Theætetus*).

Shelley recorded as having been read by him in those years ("Editor's note on the *Early Poems*;" Mrs. Shelley's ed., vol. II.), we find that those of them that related to philosophy were of a decidedly higher character than the productions of the French *Encyclopédie*, which he had studied in 1810. They included, for instance, "Locke on the Human Understanding," Bacon's "*Novum Organon*," and Rousseau's "*Rêveries d'un Solitaire*." It will be seen that he had not yet attained to idealism, though he was working up to it;¹ but that he had definitely abandoned the French philosophy for something higher. Indeed, in the "*Defence of Poetry*" (vol. I., of "*Essays, Letters, etc.*," p. 42) he animadverts somewhat severely on the moral doctrines which were the inevitable issue of, or were inseparably bound up with, the corresponding metaphysical creed of the analytical philosophers. "Their exertions," he writes, "are of the highest value, so long as they confine their administration of the concerns of the inferior powers of our nature within the limits due to the superior ones. But while the skeptic destroys gross superstitions, let him spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men." He might have applied to the *Encyclopédie* the words he elsewhere applies to slavery—

"Thou frost of the world's prime,
Killing its flowers, and leaving its thorns bare!"

But what was this "something higher," by means of which Shelley bridged over the chasm which divided the lower Materialism of 1810 from the Idealism which he finally made his own? It is difficult to determine it within other than very vague limits, as Shelley, even while he adhered to it, which was only for a short period in his mental development, had not—nor, indeed, was it to be expected of a poet—formulated it to himself with any precision. But we may easily conjecture, from the general tenor of his productions at about this time, what, in its broad outlines, it must have been, and how it gave him a stepping-stone to Berkeleyanism. The French Materialism (or perhaps, more strictly, sensationalism), allied as it was to the exclusively analytical and skeptical instinct, was death to the synthetic action of the spirit "of imagination all compact;" but we can easily enough conceive another kind of materialism—a materialism in a somewhat stricter sense—which would give room to the poet for his revels in the realm of fancy, without enabling him to

¹ He had begun to study Berkeley, at the instance of Southey, as early as 1812, according to Mr. W. M. Rossetti (introductory Memoir of Shelley, p. 167).

rise at once thereby to the highest platform from which Thought can view the world, and herself in the world. It is a theory not without grandeur, though a false one, which regards the successive flights and gradations from ascidians to the most complex organisms, from sense to the loftiest imagination, from barbarism to the most intricate civilization, from atoms and ether to the most variegated livery of the visible universe, from animal appetite to the most heroic morality, as being one and all nothing but different illustrative aspects of the grand serial evolution of all existences from the primal $\bar{\nu}\lambda\eta$, or from the formless and unfeatured void. It is a view of life and things which is often laid hold of by one of those natures which plunge enthusiastically into scientific pursuits without being corrupted by them, or rendered utterly one-sided—natures which always retain in their composition some not inconsiderable tincture of poetry, and are struck with reverential awe in the face of the spectral abstraction of matter which they have invoked from the vasty deep, not seeing, however, that, after all, it *is* an abstraction, and, as such, is born of that which should primarily claim their allegiance—"the mother of all we know"—namely, Thought. It is a view which recommends itself to a Thales in ancient or a Tyndall in modern times. It was adopted conspicuously by Bacon, in whose works, perhaps, it was that Shelley came upon that sort of reconciliation of philosophy with poetry which he could not find in the coarse sneers of a D'Holbach. We can easily understand that this gave him, at all events, a resting-place not incompatible with magnificence of creation and dalliance amid the richest fancies; and also how the doctrines of Physical Development and Physical Pantheism, peculiar to such a system, would in his mind gradually and necessarily shade off into the parallel doctrines issuing from immaterialism, namely those of what we may call Intellectual Development and Intellectual Pantheism, and how he would thus be brought definitely within the sphere of the attraction of idealism. Even in "Queen Mab,"¹ as I hinted above, the encyclopædic dissecting tendency almost disappears (in the poem itself, as distinct from Shelley's commentary thereon) before the Baconian conception of Nature, a conception which, it is

¹ I would especially refer to the following passages, as expressing a mental attitude which ascribes to Nature the grandest and most poetic attributes, and leaves less to the action of mind (contrast with Shelley's later utterances from 1815-1822). The references are to Mr. W. M. Rossetti's edition, vol. I.: (1) Pp. 20, 21; "Spirit of Nature"—"symmetry;" (2) pp. 39, 40, "Spirit of Nature"—"strength;" (3) p. 41, "These are my Empire"—"reality;" (4) p. 53, "O Happy Earth"—"perfectness."

true, gives more weight to the external than to the internal, which inclines to refer and conform spirit to matter rather than matter to spirit, which, in Bacon's own words, "doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things," rather than "submitteth the shows of things to the desires of the mind;" but one which at the same time sees the march of natural causes and the gradual and fruitful multiplication of energies with the eye of poetry.

It is noticeable, too, that at this period (1814, 1815) Shelley was studying these very philosophers whom, in the "Defence of Poetry," he pronounces to be, in the true sense of the term, poets. He says (on page 11 of that treatise), "Lord Bacon was a poet," and refers particularly to his "*Filum Labyrinthi*," and his "Essay on Death;" and on page 44 (note) he remarks: "Rousseau was essentially a poet. The others" (he alludes to Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire), "even Voltaire, were essentially reasoners," and adds that the world could have dispensed with the latter, useful as they were, but never with the former. This rejection of the "mere reasoners," in comparison with such "poets" as Bacon, and, in a less degree, Rousseau (to whom he joins, on page 11, Plato), when we consider that the reasoners mentioned are all, except Locke, French, either by nationality or in mental characteristics, serves to show us, when taken together with a passage on French skepticism, quoted a page or two back, that Shelley's dissatisfaction with them was due, not so much to the fact that they referred everything to matter, as to the fact that they did so in such a way as to leave no room for the poet in which to exercise his creative energy, no place for the sole of his foot, no solitary crag for his winged spirit to "moe her mighty youth, and kindle her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam." It was in Bacon, and men of his stamp, that Shelley found that synoptical grasp of things, in their entirety and yet in their interconnection, which imagination so dearly loves; and, finally, after once having accepted him as a refuge from what, as being destructive to fancy, he loathed, he was insensibly led on to that higher monistic system, to wit, idealism or intellectualism, which he never afterwards abandoned. How may we conjecture this next step to have been accomplished?

For a poetic mind to pass over from the notion of the consecutive evolution of all kinds of existence out of the primeval atom of matter, to the analogous notion of the consecutive evolution of all kinds of existences from the primeval idea—the simplest germ of thought—is quite natural. Matter, say the adherents of the former theory, gives

"the promise and potency" of all forms of life, motion, and even thought itself. Thought reposes on sense, sense on motion, and motion presupposes matter. Is, then, matter really the prius to thought? How is this any more explicable than to say that thought is prior in time, as it is in dignity, to matter—that matter could never have existed but as determined by intelligence? The latter view is at least *as* conceivable as the former; and when such considerations were clearly established to the mind of a man like Shelley, we can easily imagine that, if he still doubted between the two, his poetic predilections would definitely turn the balance in favor of idealism. He would naturally and necessarily replace material pantheism by what I have called an intellectualized doctrine of pantheism, and material evolution by intellectual evolution. He would transfer his worship and allegiance from Nature to the intelligence for which alone Nature is possible, and which in phenomena finds only what she herself has put there. Instead of the doctrine of the flux of external phenomena, he would adopt the doctrine of intellectual flux, which regards all *things* as ultimately *thoughts*, and all such particular thoughts as manifestations of the successive qualifications issuing from the process of thought itself.¹ Thus in this triple theory of intellectual evolution, pantheism, and flux of existences, he would find as much breadth and as grand an aspect of the universe, at least as much truth, and—for the poet—infinitely more depth and meaning than in the correlative doctrines of material evolution, pantheism, and flux of phenomena. It was, however, not without value to him to have held for a short time previously the corresponding material tenets, as these, by their largeness of grasp, conducted him gradually to a view of things which he possibly might not have attained without some such convenient stepping-stone²—

"For speculation turns not to itself
Till it hath travelled, and is married there
Where it may see itself."

I am aware that it would be quite ridiculous to suppose that

¹ Shelley's lines (in the little poem called "Love's Philosophy"): "Nothing in this world is simple; all things by a law divine in one another's being mingle," is an echo of either of the two parallel doctrines of "the flux of things" to which I have referred.

² It is interesting to know (from the extracts from Williams's diary, given in Mr. Garnett's article in the "Fortnightly Review," for June) that Shelley was a student of Spinoza's work, and meditated—and partially executed—a translation of his "Tractatus Ethico-politicus."

any such precisely formulated process as the above took place in Shelley's mind ; it is merely suggested that, whether consciously or unconsciously, he worked out something like it, and that so, after having tried a lower and a higher, a more analytic and a more constructive system of materialism, he was finally landed in the truer type of monism known as the immaterial or intellectual philosophy. For the truth of such a hypothesis I would appeal to the reader to carefully examine his poetical works in their chronological order. As regards direct statements of the change in his metaphysical views, which came over him in about the year 1815 (when his study of Berkeley, commenced in 1812, had definitely borne fruit), I may quote the following passage from the "Essay on Life" (in "Essays, Letters, etc.," vol. I., p. 226), written at that time :—

"It is a decision against which all our persuasions struggle, and we must be long convicted before we can be convinced that the solid universe of things is 'such stuff as dreams are made of.' The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy, . . . etc., [the next words have been quoted above] . . . had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a reducing 'system to young and superficial minds.' ['Quantum mutatus ab illo Hectore' of 1810 !] It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking. But I was discontented with such a view of things as it afforded ; man is a being of high aspirations, 'looking both before and after,' whose 'thoughts wander through eternity,' disclaiming alliance with transience and decay ; incapable of imagining to himself annihilation ; existing but in the future and the past ; being, not what he is, but what he has been and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit in him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution. This is the character of all life and being. Each is at once the centre and the circumference ; the point to which all things are referred, and the line in which all things are contained. Such contemplations as these materialism and the popular philosophy of mind and matter [*sc.* Dualism] alike forbid ; they are only consistent with the intellectual system."

On p. 242 of the same volume, he says :—

"By considering all knowledge as bounded by perception" [this last word is evidently used in a larger sense than the ordinary one. It was the unconscious use of "percipere" by Berkeley in this wider meaning, as almost—"intelligere," which gave a good deal of its plausibility to his system], "whose operations may be indefinitely

combined,¹ we arrive at a conception of Nature inexpressibly more magnificent, simple, and true than accords with the ordinary systems of complicated and partial consideration."

Shelley, then, had now come to believe in the world of nature and of spirit as both existing solely for universal mind ; but he did not believe in a Personal God. It may be asked : why did he not, like his master, Berkeley, take this further step ? The fact is that, though Shelley called himself, and Mrs. Shelley called him, a Berkeleian, in reality he was never a thorough-going disciple of Berkeley, though he was nearer to being so than to anything else. Berkeley's Personal God was too much of a "*Deus et machina*" to attract Shelley. On the contrary, it probably repelled him as a pedagogic device "for the refutation of atheism," as unbecoming the resolute earnestness and dignity of the true philosophic search for truth—in fact, as one of those "pitiful sophisms" (as he says on one occasion of the current proofs of the immortality of the soul) "which disgrace the cause." Moreover, Shelley's personal hostility to all creeds and dogmas, and the influences which the bitter conflicts of his youth had left behind on his delicately strung imagination, were certainly not without their share in determining him to stop short at this point.

But in another respect, yet ultimately from the same causes, he went beyond Berkeley. The latter attributed something to the "percipere" of individual minds, but a great deal more to the action on those minds of a Personal Deity. The two together gave the "esse." Now, Shelley eliminated the latter element ; consequently, to produce the same result he had to attach vastly more importance, and ascribe a far more extensive influence, to the creative work of singular minds, and ultimately to that of the universal but impersonal mind, to which he, in the last resort, referred the former. It is true that he says sometimes in his prose works, "mind cannot create ; it can only perceive ;" but, in the first place, in all such passages the word "perceive" is used in the enlarged sense mentioned above ; and, secondly, to determine his real beliefs we must look not so much to their direct exposition as to their indirect influ-

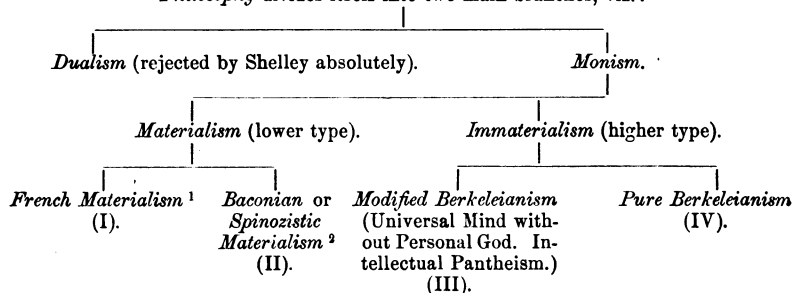
¹ This sentiment is reflected in "*Peter Bell the Third*" (Mrs. Shelley's edition, vol. II., p. 392):—

"Yet his was individual mind,
And new-created all he saw
In a new manner, and refined
Those new creations, and combined
Them, by a master-spirit's law."

ence on the tone of his poetry, whence it will be apparent that he attributed far more to the active and constructive operations of individual minds than was possible to a rigidly consistent Berkeleian. Berkeley, indeed, marked off such intellectual activity in particular minds from their supposed passivity in the reception of influences from external phenomena, and totally denied the existence of the latter. So far Shelley followed him; but then Berkeley went further, and affirmed, which Shelley did not, the existence of another kind of passivity in particular minds as distinct from their activity, a passivity, namely, in regard to the ideas imparted "ab extra" by the Deity.

What would have happened had Shelley lived to attain old age—the calm old age of Goethe, for instance—we cannot tell; but we may conjecture that, after emerging from the same youth-period of "storm and stress," and the same stages of, first, doubt, and then a grand catholic Nature-worship, in his mental growth, which the German poet had passed through, he would finally, like him, have learned to attach their proper value to these and other sides and aspects of life, and would have brought his well-buffed vessel into a haven of assured, though quiet and temperate, conviction—conviction protected against assault from without no less than purified from dogma within. But all this is mere conjecture. Before passing on to facts concerning Shelley's idealistic tenets, I subjoin (hoping that it will not be considered too pedantic) a tabular exposition of what my view is of the stages in his philosophical development, as already determined.

Philosophy divides itself into two main branches, viz.:



It will be seen from the above table, taken in conjunction with the pages preceding it, that Shelley adopted (I) up to about 1810. He

¹ Or more properly, perhaps, Sensationalism. ² Scarcely strict Materialism at all.

then abandoned it for (II), to which he adhered till about 1812 or so, when he began gradually to incline toward (III), which he definitely adopted in 1815, and retained till 1822, the year of his death. (IV) He never reached at all.

Such, then, or something like it, was the genesis in Shelley's mind of the metaphysical creed which he finally adopted. We may take a somewhat modified Berkeleianism as the ultimate expression of his most matured thoughts on philosophical questions (as is evident from the poet's more considered utterances as to his beliefs in the last years of his life, as well as from the statements of Mrs. Shelley¹), and, what is of more importance, as ruling by far the larger and better part of his poetry. And here I may quote one or two passages from both Shelley himself and Mrs. Shelley, by way of showing the consistency with which—after having once thoroughly solved his preliminary doubts—he advocated and held fast to his system up to the end; after which I will conclude by noticing, from a consideration of his poetical works themselves, the nature and extent of the influence which that system exerted on them.

The first passage is from Mrs. Shelley's preface to her edition of the "Essays, Letters from Abroad, etc." (vol. I., p. xii.) :—

"Shelley was a disciple of the Immaterial Philosophy of Berkeley. This theory gave unity and grandeur to his ideas, while it opened a wide field for his imagination. The creation, such as it was perceived by his mind—a unit in immensity, was slight and narrow compared with the interminable forms of thought that might exist beyond, to be perceived perhaps hereafter by his own mind; or which are perceptible to other minds that fill the universe, not of space in the material sense, but of infinity in the immaterial one."

These remarks had immediate reference to Shelley's incomplete "Essay on Life." In this fragment, which we may assign to 1815, he himself says (p. 225 of the same volume) :—

"The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life, which, though startling to the apprehension, is, in fact, that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us. It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things. I confess that I am one of those who are unable to refuse their assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived."

¹ Cp. Mr. W. M. Rossetti ("Introductory Memoir of Shelley," pp. 165–168), who was among the first, after Mrs. Shelley, to notice the influence of Immaterialism in Shelley's poetry.

Again (pp. 228, 229) :—

“The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the Intellectual Philosophy is that of unity. . . . The difference is merely nominal between those two classes of thought which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. *The words, ‘I, You, They,’ are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks to denote the different modifications of the one mind.*”

Here we have a distinct enunciation of the doctrine of the universal, but impersonal, mind which marked off Shelley’s immaterialism from that of Berkeley.¹ The two passages, then, just quoted, when taken together, show that Shelley held the modified Berkeleyianism, which has been already described, in 1815, which year marked the first term in his best period. He died in 1822. If, now, we take a passage from the “Defence of Poetry,” written in 1821, expressing exactly the same views, and showing, moreover, indirectly how those views fell in with his poetic instincts, we shall see that he kept true to intellectualism during the last seven years of his life, the years when he produced all his finest works—“Alastor,” “Mont Blanc,” “Laon and Cythna” (“The Revolt of Islam”), “Julian and Maddalo,” “Prometheus Unbound,” “Cenci,” “Epipsychidion,” “The Witch of Atlas,” “The Sensitive Plant,” “Hellas,” and “Adonais.” In that treatise (Vol. I. of “Essays, Letters, etc.,” p. 51) he writes :

“All things exist as they are perceived ; at least in relation to the percipient. ‘The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven or hell, a hell of heaven.’ But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life’s dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges

¹ He concludes the fragment with a curious sentence. While freely admitting that existence=thought, which again implies mind, he yet says : “It is infinitely improbable that the cause of mind, that is, of existence, is similar to mind.” Does this mean that he had not yet quite purged himself of the higher or Baconian Materialism, from which, at about this period (1815), his passage to Idealism would have been made ?

from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies the bold and true words of Tasso: '*Non merita nome di Creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.*'"

It is, perhaps, worth mentioning, before passing on to the main thread of the argument, that, though Shelley was certainly well acquainted with Berkeley's works (as has been already seen), yet it seems to have been through the "Academical Questions" of Sir William Drummond, a faithful follower of the Intellectualist school, that he made his most rapid and searching approaches towards Berkeleyianism. He had read this treatise before writing "*Queen Mab*" (1810), and even after he had begun to read Berkeley (1812); he refers to his co-disciple Drummond more often than to their common master. In the "*Essay on Life*" (1815), for instance, he writes:—

"Perhaps the most clear and vigorous statement of the Intellectual system is to be found in Sir William Drummond's '*Academical Questions.*' After such an exposition, it would be idle to translate into other words what would only lose its energy and fitness by the change. Examined point by point, and word by word, the most discriminating intellects have been able to discern no train of thoughts in the process of reasoning which does not conduct inevitably to the conclusion which has been stated."

Again, in 1817, in his preface to "*The Revolt of Islam*," after having characterized "metaphysics and inquiries into moral and political science," as having in his day become "little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions"—hinting, no doubt, at what he elsewhere calls the "popular philosophy"—that is, Dualism—he adds, in a note: "I ought to except Sir W. Drummond's '*Academical Questions*,' a volume of very acute and powerful criticism" ("*Shelley's Works*," ed. Mrs. Shelley, vol. I., p. 64).¹ In "*Peter*

¹ It is curious to compare these statements of the last period of his philosophical development with a notice of Sir W. Drummond in his first period—the period of "*Queen Mab*." In one of the notes to that poem we find the following: "Had this author, instead of inveighing against the guilt and absurdity of Atheism, demonstrated its falsehood, his conduct would have been more suited to the modesty of the skeptic and the toleration of the philosopher" (Rossetti's ed. of Shelley, vol. I., p. 74). This is the language of the poet in his early days of French philosophizing and dogmatic Atheism. He saw in Drummond *then* only the impugner of Atheism and Materialism, and, in that character, regarded him as expressing views inconsistent with the skepticism

Bell the Third" (written in 1819), he again just refers to Drummond in the lines,

"I looked on them [*sc.* five thousand pages of German
psychologies] nine several days,
And then I saw that they were bad ;
A friend, too, spoke in their dispraise—
He never read them: in amaze,
I found Sir William Drummond had."

As to the special character and merits of Sir W. Drummond's work in philosophy, I cannot speak for myself, as I have been unable to procure a copy of it. The treatise to which Shelley alludes appeared in 1805, and was of sufficient importance to attract the attention of Lord Jeffrey, who wrote an article on it, where he says ("Essays," vol. III., p. 351): "though it gave a violent headache, in less than an hour, to the most intrepid logician of our fraternity, he could not help reading on till he came to the end of the volume." He then proceeds:—

"Mr. Drummond begins with the doctrine of Locke ; and exposes, we think, very successfully, the futility of that celebrated author's definition of substance, as '*one knows not what*' support of such qualities as are capable of producing simple ideas in us. Having thus discarded substance in general from the list of existences, Mr. Drummond proceeds to do as much for the particular substance called matter, and all its qualities. In this chapter, accordingly, he avows himself to be a determined Idealist. . . . His reasoning upon this subject" (viz., primary qualities being on the same footing as secondary) "coincides with that of Bishop Berkeley. . . etc."

So much for one main source—as far as books could constitute such a source—of Shelley's Immaterialism. And now as to the general coloring of his poetry attributable to that system of philosophy. First of all, I propose to instance one or two characteristic passages (all belonging to the period 1815-'22), where he has introduced or probably reflected—of course in a more or less imaginative form, and with all the illuminative hues with which he knew so well how to enrich his thought—his peculiar metaphysical doctrines.¹

which he seems to have thought that, as a Berkeleyian, Drummond should have *alone* maintained. It required further and deeper study to enable Shelley to see the constructive elements and fertility for poetic uses in Intellectualism. At that period he certainly had not arrived at such a view.

¹ In one or two cases, indeed, he was on the verge of sacrificing poetry to philosophy. Mr. W. M. Rossetti truly says, in his introductory "Memoir of Shelley:" "In Shelley

Apart from the long passage quoted above from the "Hellas," we have, in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," as it were, the religious and æsthetical counterpart to the merely ratiocinative side of intellectualism. Shelley here appears no longer as the mere lay believer in the articles of his creed, but as the high-priest and rapt votary of the divinity which it recognizes in her loveliest aspects as—not sensuous, but—ideal, intellectual beauty. In "Alastor" and "Eipsychidion" the poet represented himself in the character of one who prosecutes the bootless quest of that perfect union of loveliness of form with transcendent intelligence which can be realized only to lose its ideality, or, if it retains the latter, is seen for an instant, only to vanish away the next "*par levibus ventis, volucrique simillima somno.*" In a similar strain, he cries out, in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty:"—

"I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
 To thee and thine: have I not kept the vow?
 With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
 I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
 Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
 Of studious zeal or love's delight
 Outwatched with me the envious night:
 They know that never joy illumed my brow,
 Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
 This world from its dark slavery,
 That thou, O awful loveliness,
 Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express."

In these lines speaks the adherent of Immaterialism, but of an immaterialism richly dight in poetry's coat of many colors. With less of imaginative addition, the opening verses of "*Mont Blanc*" speak for themselves:—

"The everlasting universe of things
 Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves
 (Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
 Now lending splendor, where from secret springs
 The source of human thought its tribute brings
 Of waters), with a sound but half its own . . ." etc.

the predominant quality of all is the ideal . . . this tinges most of his work, and at times even blemishes it. He was himself particularly attached to the metaphysical element in his poetry, which is of course one great constituent of his idealism." He also speaks of "a peccant element of unrealism, a slippery hold upon the human" characterizing his narrative poems. Shelley himself thought that his powers were too metaphysical and abstract to allow of his succeeding in tragedy. But here he formed a too low estimate of himself, as "The Cenci" alone shows.

Shelley concludes the poem, addressing the mountain :—

“ And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind’s imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy ? ”

This last has a decided ring of idealism in it. So, too, have the following lines from the “*The Sensitive Plant* : ” indeed, in their insistence on the eternity of thought, and on the transcendence of everything else, except as existing in and treasured by thought, they almost remind us of Fichte or Hegel :—

“ . . . In this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
And we the shadows of the dream.

“ It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant, if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

“ That garden sweet, that lady fair,
And all sweet shapes and odors there,
In truth have never passed away :
’Tis we, ’tis ours, are changed ; not they.”

So much, then, by way of instancing in certain parts of Shelley’s works the more immediate reflection of his idealistic philosophy. Now let us consider the influence which that philosophy exerted on his poetic moods, and in determining the forms and language and metaphoric clothing assumed by his imagination. And this latter is really the more important point to investigate ; for, just as the vividness and practical efficacy of a man’s theoretical beliefs on questions of morality is better seen in his daily life and works than in isolated and formal professions of faith, so the real hold a particular system of metaphysics has on the mind of a poet is better seen in his general conception of the scope of his art, in his use of the instruments of creative energy, and in his way of dealing with concretes and abstractions, as traced in the main tenor of his productions, than in selected passages comprising, so to speak, official subscriptions to the articles of his doctrine.

Neither Shelley himself nor his best critic, Mrs. Shelley, were in any doubt as to the general effect produced on his imagination by the philosophy of Immaterialism. “*The unity and grandeur*”

which, in Mrs. Shelley's words,¹ it "gave to his ideas," and "the wide field for his imagination," are results ascribed to it in quite as emphatic language by the poet himself (in a passage already quoted—"Essays, Letters, etc.," vol. I., p. 242). Mrs. Shelley again, in her note on the "Prometheus Unbound," writes:—

"It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction; but they are far from vague. It was his design to write prose metaphysical essays on the nature of man, *which would have served to explain much of what is obscure in his poetry*; a few scattered fragments of observations and remarks alone remain. *He considered these philosophical views of mind and nature to be instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry.*"

Indeed, the kind of stamp which Intellectualism would leave on the writings of a man of Shelley's nature would not be difficult to surmise from *a priori* considerations. A system of immaterial philosophy gives less importance to the external, as such, than to the internal, to the phenomenal than to the spiritual, to the objective than to the subjective. In matter it sees nothing but the vesture and outward efflorescence of some product of mind; while in every affection of mind—in the waking vision, the vivid dream, the apparently lawless flight of fancy—it sees a supreme reality. In a concrete object it sees only the shrine of an abstract idea; in an abstract idea, on the other hand, it sees the only true existence and the only true divinity. It idealizes and humanizes the material; and the ideal it personifies and clothes with the definite outlines of individuality. To the adherent of such views as these the work of poetry would appear only as a richer and higher exercise of the same faculty which, from the strictly metaphysical side of Idealism, is occupied, as has been said, in "substantializing relations and bringing substances into relation."

Now, this twofold use of imagination is just that for which Shelley is most conspicuous. Every poem that he wrote during his best period illustrates one or both of these two modes in which creative

¹ Passage quoted above from the preface to the "Essays, Letters from Abroad, etc." The question has been sometimes raised as to Mrs. Shelley's capability of appreciating her husband's powers. I may take this opportunity of remarking that it certainly seems to me that, notwithstanding all that has been written on Shelley since, no better account of the salient features in his genius is to be found than in the prefaces and notes written by her to his different works.

thought may exercise itself upon its object, namely, on the one hand, bodying forth and materializing ideas ; on the other, spiritualizing phenomena, whether of material nature, physical forces, or human action. I do not, of course, mean to deny that every good poet performs this double function more or less constantly ; but Shelley does so to an almost preternatural degree—a degree which, taken together with what we know of his unfailing taste for philosophical pursuits, leads us to suppose that his metaphysics, if they did not create the particular paths along which his fancy travelled, gave them, at all events, a (so to speak) theoretical justification.

The latter of these two correlative tendencies of imagination—tendencies which are largely supported by, if they do not issue from, a speculative doctrine of idealism—is not unfrequently noticed by Mrs. Shelley. She says, for instance (Shelley's "Poetical Works," I., 372) : "Shelley loved to idealize the real—to gift the mechanism of the material universe with a soul and a voice." When, however, she adds, "More popular poets clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery," implying that Shelley did not do so to any great extent, she forgot that the same cast of mind which sees in the variable phenomenon only the unchanging ideal is, for the very same reason, so enamored of the creations of phantasy, and so possessed with the conviction of their eternal self-subsistence, that it is ever seeking to relieve itself from its tortures in the endeavor to embody them in substantial and yet communicable shapes. "To clothe them in familiar and sensible imagery ;" *there* is indeed the difficulty—a difficulty great in proportion to the vaporous delicacy of the conceived ideal. It was the hopelessness of attaining to a perfect representation of such ideals, without destroying and dissolving them as such, which inspired those sublimest poems, "The Alastor" and "The Epipsychidion." But that Shelley had an ardent love for ideal forms issuing fresh from the clear wells of inspiration within, as well as those to be discovered lurking and latent under realities without ; and wished, moreover, not only in the domain of art, but also in that of practical morality (both of which are built on the eternal contradiction between the perfect constructions of speculative reason and imagination, on the one side, and the limited human possibilities of action and unlimited human frailties, on the other), to impress these forms, as nearly as possible in their pristine purity, on surrounding facts—is elsewhere, though indirectly, recognized by Mrs. Shelley. In the preface to her edition of her husband's poetical works (vol. I., p. xi.), she says : "He loved to idealize reality ;

and this is a taste shared by few. We are willing to have our passing whims exalted into passions, for this gratifies our vanity; but few of us understand or sympathize with *the endeavor to ally the love of abstract beauty and adoration of abstract good . . . with our sympathies with our kind.*"

Shelley's attitude towards the ideal must therefore be looked at from two points of view. It is the first of these—the idealization of the else meaningless and incoherent phenomena of Nature—which is perhaps too prominently insisted on by Mrs. Shelley; it is the second, the substantializing creations of thought, which is, certainly, too prominently insisted on by Macaulay;¹ but we cannot form a true estimate of Shelley's poetry without recognizing the equal existence and mutual interaction of both these mental forces in his genius.

Shelley's idealization of Nature was one which takes no heed of special facts or phenomena except as material on which to beget the forms of abstract beauty. He views the shifting flux of things with complete indifference as to those things for their own sakes; and looks not so much *at*, as *through*, the sensuous shapes which Matter presents to him:—

"Nor much heeds he what things they be,
For from them create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality."

His works teem with examples of Mr. Ruskin's "Pathetic Fallacy"—which so-called fallacy, however, is all that distinguishes mental painting or sculpture from mere mental photography—of events or phenomena, selected, combined, added to, and embellished, in such a way as to form nothing but the setting for the clearer display of some gem-like radiancy of thought or emotion. They abound in what Mr. Stirling ("Secret of Hegel," Preface, p. xlvi.) notices as

¹ He writes:—"The strong imagination of Shelley made him an idolater in his own despite. Out of the most indefinite terms of a hard, cold, dark, metaphysical system, he made a gorgeous Pantheon, full of beautiful, majestic, and life-like forms. . . . The Spirit of Beauty, the Principle of Good, the Principle of Evil, when he treated of them, ceased to be abstractions. They took shape and color. They were no longer mere words. . . . As there can be no stronger sign of a mind destitute of the poetical faculty, than the . . . tendency to turn images into abstractions, . . . so there can be no stronger sign of a mind truly poetical than a disposition to reverse the process, and to make individualities out of generalities." This passage is a good instance of Macaulay's incapacity to look at things from more than one side. He insists on one element in Shelley's genius very properly; but then he is not content without not only ignoring, but denying the other.

instances of *Vorstellungen* or picture-thoughts, midway between the absolutely abstract conceptions of philosophy and the concrete figures and "idola fori" in ordinary use. Every energy of Nature is transmitted by him, and bathed in "that light which never was on sea or shore." It would be idle to begin quoting here: instances will occur to the reader in the most lavish abundance, or, at all events, may easily enough be found by opening Shelley at almost any page.

It will be of more interest to dwell a little before concluding on the correlative aspect (described above) of the domination exercised by idealism on such a fervent fancy as was that of Shelley to start with. The externalizing of imagination-born forms is to the spiritualizing of given phenomena as concave to convex of one and the same curve, as obverse to reverse of one and the same coin. The latter has been noticed again and again in Shelley's poetry; the former not so often, and is perhaps less obvious.

Other poets, of course in abundance, had personified ideas and ideal relations "ante Agamemnona;" but none of them had done so with the boldness and constancy and sweet wantonness of Shelley. Setting aside such poems as the "Prometheus Unbound," the "Hellas," and "The Revolt of Islam," which form a sort of trilogy, regarded as presenting embodiments of one sublime central idea, viz., the perfectibility of man by means of reason and will alone—an idea which, by the way, brings him near several philosophers of different schools who have discussed the accidental character of evil, and the possibility of effecting its gradual evanescence by human means¹—even setting aside these, we find that in most of his other poetry, at all events from 1815 to 1822, Shelley, with his grand, imaginative audacity, never hesitates to objectify and individualize conceptions which, from their excessive abstractness and airy elasticity, would cause any other poet to shrink from confining them within form or outlines, and to relegate them in despair to the cold limbo of pure,

¹ *E. g.*, Kant, J. S. Mill. For Shelley's belief that evil in human things is an accident that might be expelled by the united will of mankind, vid. Mrs. Shelley's note on "Prometheus Unbound" (vol. I., p. 370, of "Poetical Works"). In "The Revolt of Islam" the influence of Godwin is perceptible. Shelley, like Schopenhauer, regarded the Ego as confronting and warring against existing facts; and, like him, he believed that evil could be eliminated. But, as might be expected, their conceptions of the method of effecting this were diametrically opposite. Schopenhauer wished to reduce activity, life, subjectiveness, will, to the Nirwana of the impersonal and objective; thus would be ensured a "divine tranquillity without one pleasure and without one pain." Shelley, on the contrary, said: "Let every personality express itself to the utmost, and elevate to its own platform the discordant facts of existence."

colorless intelligence. In the "Alastor," for instance, "Silence, too enamored of that voice, locks its mute music in her rugged cell." And, besides Silence, we have a whole legion of abstractions anthropomorphized elsewhere, such as Hope, Mutability, Misery, etc. A very subtle emotional process is objectified in the words, "to hope till Hope creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates." Of this sublimely paradoxical way of making that which is negative positive, of transforming what appears to others as shadow into substance—of giving Silence its "mute music," and Hope the power of "creating from its own wreck,"²—we have another still bolder instance in the "Fragment on Misery." The poet calls on personified Misery *to be happy* :—

"Come, be happy! Sit near me,
Shadow-vested Misery.
Coy, unwilling, silent bride,
Mourning in thy robe of pride.
Desolation—deified!"

Nor is he afraid of pursuing the metaphor to its extremest issues :—

"Kiss me—oh! thy lips are cold;
Round my neck thine arms enfold—
They are soft, but chill and dead;
And thy tears upon my head
Burn like points of frozen lead.

"Hasten to the bridal bed—
Underneath the grave 'tis spread;
In darkness may our love be hid,
Oblivion be our coverlid—
We may rest and none forbid.

"Clasp me till our hearts be grown
Like two shadows into one;
Till this dreadful transport may
Like a vapor pass away
In the sleep that lasts away.

"We may dream in that long sleep,
That we are not those who weep;
Even as Pleasure dreams of thee,
Life-deserting Misery,
Thou mayest dream of her with me."

² *Cp.* a somewhat similar expression in the "Prometheus:"—

" . . . the lullaby
Of winds that die
On the bosom of their own harmony."

It is scarcely conceivable that the force of imagination could go further in incarnating the most negative abstractions. Similarly, Mutability, the negation of Permanence, is often personified, and not only personified, but regarded as itself permanent, and the only permanent :—

“Man’s yesterday may ne’er be like his morrow ;
Naught may endure but mutability.”¹

In the “Prometheus Unbound” even Echoes, which are to voice as shadow to substance, are given a positive existence, and appear, calling on Asia and Panthea to follow :—

Echoes (unseen.)
“Echoes we: listen!
We cannot stay:
As dew-stars glisten,
Then fade away.”

Thus we have constant Inconstancy, musical Silence, happy Misery, and Echo with underived voice. Such is the kind of way in which Shelley revels in substantializing the negative and personifying the ideal and abstract. Anything related to Thought, Sound, Space, or Time he loves to clothe with a more or less definite individuality. Every one remembers Shelley’s beautiful pictures of the “Hungry Hours,” the “Stray Hours,” etc. One in particular of these, which is singularly grand, and comes, like so many other of his best images, from the “Prometheus,” may be mentioned here. At the beginning of the fourth act is introduced “A Train of Dark Forms and Shadows,” who are introduced singing :—

“Here, oh! here:
We bear the bier,
Of the Father of many a cancelled year!
Spectres we,
Of the dead Hours be,
We bear Time to his tomb in Eternity.”¹

¹ Cp. The two Odes to Mutability, a conception frequently personified in Shelley’s works.

¹ Other conceptions anthropomorphized in Shelley are Thought (“by the snake Memory stung”—Adonais), Death, who “blushes to annihilation” (Adonais), Dream, (P. Unb.), Oppression, Loveliness, Science “with cloedal wings,” Spirit of Night, Love, Breath, Wisdom, Eternity, Shame, “Desires and Adorations, Winged Persuasions, and Veiled Destinies, Splendors and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies, and Sorrow, with her family of Sighs, and Pleasure, blind with tears” (cp. “happy Misery”), Incarnate April, Frost the Anatomy, Moon of Love, Eternity, etc. The “Prometheus,” in particular, unfolds before us a whole phantasmagorical pageantry of abstractions.

It would, of course, be ridiculously fanciful to suppose that the above-mentioned tendencies of Shelley's genius are to be laid, even to any considerable degree, to the credit of his metaphysical system. That system only afforded him, as I said above, a reasoned background for the uses of imagination which he indulged—afforded him a legitimation or "deduction" (as Kant would call it) for what might otherwise have appeared to him to be merely the lawless aberrations of creative power. One who firmly believed in the reality (in the highest and truest sense) of everything created or combined by mental faculties, could never be ashamed of following the mazes of Thought to their utmost bound, and would never shrink from tasting to the full "the feasts of beautiful discourse" ("ἑστιάσεις ἡαλῶν λόγων," Plato).

But there were, no doubt, several other and more important elements which went to the forming of Shelley's poetry. Just as a stage in the intellectual development of a nation cannot be fully understood without tracing back to their sources both of the two distinct streams, the intellectual and the social, which unite to produce it (take, for instance, the pessimism of Lucretius in Rome, or of Schopenhauer in Germany; in either case we find a double explanation of the origin of the system, the one consisting in an account of the previous successive stages in the evolution of philosophical principles, the other in an account of the gradual growth of social forces and conditions), so the direction assumed by the imaginative energy of such a poet as Shelley cannot be entirely comprehended without taking into consideration both the intellectual habits and moral tendencies attributable to his personality, and also the spirit of his time; either of which was, no doubt, an ingredient in his composition as a poet of at least as much importance as the particular philosophical views which he entertained.

In the first place, the intellectual, and more especially, the poetic atmosphere which he breathed, and in the midst of which he moved and had his being, was decidedly favorable to the growth of the particular faculties mainly exercised by him. "While with the Greeks," it has been said ("Guesses at Truth," first series, p. 98), "the unseen world was the world of shadows, in the great works of modern times there is a more or less conscious feeling that the outward world of the eye is the world of shadows, that the tangled web of life is to be swept away, and that the invisible world is the only abode of true, living realities." It was the object of the school ushered in by Wordsworth to learn to reverence in Nature, mainly

and primarily, "the Divine Ideal which underlies all appearance" (Fichte), and Shelley could not have been unmoved by such influences. (At the beginning of his last and best period, 1815-1822, he wrote his lament over Wordsworth, beginning "Poet of Nature," etc.; "O there are spirits in the air," was addressed in thought to Coleridge¹ at about the same time.)

As to his personal characteristics, every one has heard of his abnormally acute sensibility and impulsive temperament. In the different lives of him which have been written, we are constantly having stories of his vivid dreams, which he could not persuade himself *were* dreams, and which often drove him from his room with cries of horror;² nay, more, of his waking visions, of the reality of which he used to be equally convinced. This nervous intensity of imagination, giving all the force of positive existence to every long-pondered creation of his mind, to every

"incommunicable dream
And twilight phantasm, and deep noonday thought,"

must have worked with his philosophy to produce the kind of poetry it did. Bearing in mind these passionate susceptibilities of his—moral as well as intellectual—we can, moreover, explain, without having much recourse to his metaphysical doctrines, the passionate and generous spirit which would at one time "sadly blame the jarring and inexplicable frame of this wrong world," and at another would declaim with fiery vigor against "the harsh and grating cry of tyrants and of foes,"³ which was ever dissatisfied with the seemingly immobile and unplastic facts of his social environment, and which yet always believed against experience, and hoped against hope, that Man—even "cruel, cold, formal Man"—could and would, by willing it, emancipate himself from inveterate prejudice and self-

¹ *Cp.* the fine description of Coleridge in Shelley's "Letter to Maria Gisborne" (vol. III., p. 53, in Mrs. Shelley's ed.).

² In the vividness of his dreams, Shelley reminds us of Coleridge, De Quincey, and Blake. In "Essays, Letters, etc.," vol. I., pp. 248-'51, he gives some account of the phenomena of dreams, and is beginning to recount one which occurred in his own experience, when, as he afterward wrote, he was obliged to leave off through being overcome "by thrilling horror."

³ Was Wordsworth, a poet more at ease with circumstances and his fellows, thinking of these words when he spoke of his "hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity, *not harsh nor grating*, though of ample power to chasten or subdue?" At any rate, in these two passages, the different characters of the two poets are well expressed.

ishness, from "old custom" and "legal crime," and stand forth once more in purified rejuvenescence.¹ His energies were always devoted to stamping, as far as he could, the things and circumstances around him with the impress of an ideal—an ideal which, since it was very truth and reality to him, he wished to see externalized, and thus become equally so to others. The untiring zeal in endeavoring to imprint such ideals on the face of the actual conditions of existence, which we see reflected in such poems as the "Hellas" and the "Prometheus," the "passion for reforming the world,"² which he so fearlessly avowed; these, no doubt, came from his moral character; but in the construction of "the beautiful idealisms of moral excellence," with which, as he says, it was his "purpose to familiarize the more select classes of poetical readers," it is not perhaps extravagant to attribute something to the working upon his imagination of the speculative principles of Idealism.

Thus both intellectual and social environment, and personal tendencies of sentiment and character, largely assisted the philosophy of Shelley in determining the cast of his poetry; but we must not any the more lose sight of this last factor as a distinctly important one, especially when we remember that Shelley was within an ace of becoming a metaphysician pure and simple;³ that, even as it was, he was throughout his life "philosophy's accepted guest," and that he himself regarded metaphysical studies as an element in the train-

¹ Shelley's tone, though pessimistic at times (*e. g.*, in both the two beautiful pieces on "Mutability"), is in general distinctly optimistic as to the possible future of the human race. See the concluding choruses of the "Prometheus Unbound," and, above all, the soft, halcyon verses of prophecy and hope which conclude the "Hellas," and lull to rest the fierce discords of the opening of the drama.

² Shelley's preface to the "Prometheus Unbound." He somewhat bitterly alludes to the many disappointments which await the earnest reformer, in the lines at the close of the third part of "Peter Bell the Third": "And some few, like we know who, damned—but God alone knows why—to believe their minds are given to make this ugly hell a heaven; in which faith they live and die." The second part of Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," which unfortunately he did not write, was to have contained "a defence of the attempt to idealize the modern forms of manners and opinions, and compel them into a subordination to the imaginative and creative faculty." Here we see a meeting point of his moral character with his idealism.

³ According to Mrs. Shelley (editor's note on "The Revolt of Islam"), "Shelley possessed two remarkable qualities of intellect—a brilliant imagination, and a logical exactness of reason. His inclinations led him (he fancied) almost alike to poetry and metaphysical discussions, . . . he said that he deliberated at one time whether he should so devote himself to poetry or metaphysics." *Cp.* also editor's note on the "Cenci" (ii., 116).

ing—though not of course the making—of a poet (vid. his preface to “The Revolt of Islam”).

In examining the philosophical element in the writings of a poet, we accustom ourselves, on the one hand, to regard the poetic mind as *not* “of imagination *all compact*,” but as a whole which very various forces combine to build up; and, on the other hand, to notice the special bond which unites poetry and philosophy as correlative and interdependent factors in constituting the best possible view of the universe, as it exists for human thought. When once we perceive the mutual interaction of Poetry and Philosophy at every stage in the intellectual growth of all nations, we begin to detect the philosopher in Schiller, Wordsworth, Sophocles, and Shakespeare, as well as the poet in Kant, Spinoza, Plato, or Bacon; and we understand both orders of mind the better for being able to do so.

Thus it is that Shelley is a particularly favorable subject of study—because, as has been pointed out, in him the poetic afflatus and the metaphysical impulse were so evenly and harmoniously balanced and interblended. Shelley would have been in many respects a dialectician—a “*συννοτικός*”—after Plato’s own heart. We set Schiller over against Kant, and Shakespeare over against Bacon, sometimes, to explain one another; but to explain Shelley the philosopher, we resort to Shelley the poet, and to interpret Shelley the poet, we appeal to Shelley the philosopher. We must not, certainly, in considering the character of his poetry, forget either the acute sensibility and passionate devotion to ideas, which was given him by nature, or the times and circumstances and literary surroundings amid which he lived:—

“By solemn vision and bright silver dream
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.”

All this we must take into consideration in estimating his work; but the words which immediately succeed the above in the “Alastor” we must also remember, if we would read him aright as a poet; we must recognize that throughout his life, apart from these other influences,

“The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips.”

It is this latter aspect of his genius that I have endeavored to bring prominently forward in these pages.